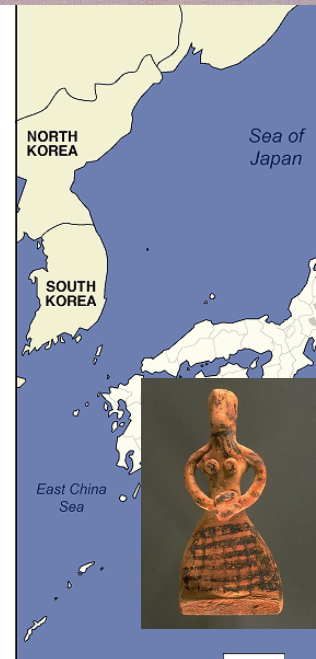


ANCIENT ASIA:: HIS 219

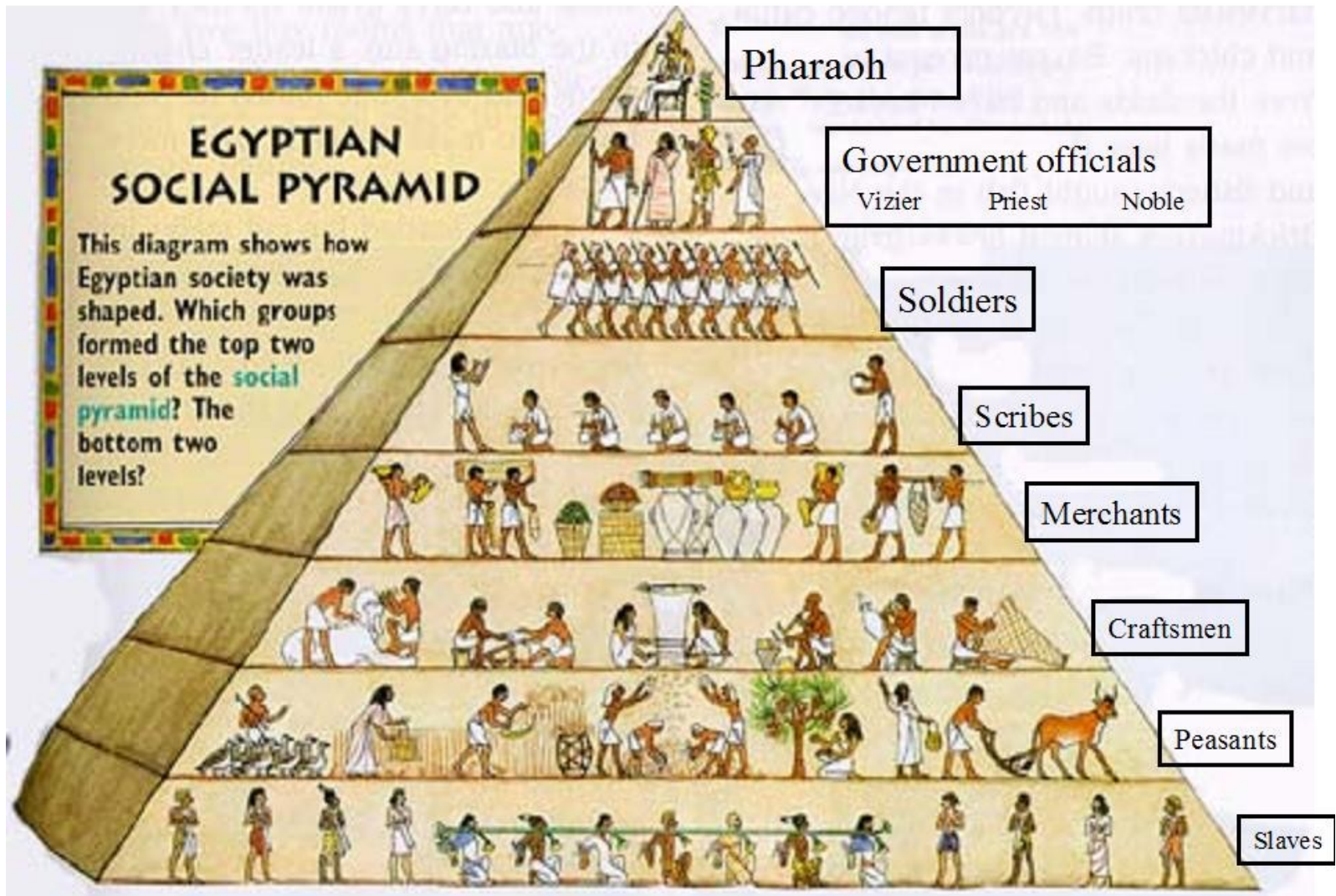
Chapter Three



To accompany
A History of Asia
Chapter 3,
The Societies of Asia

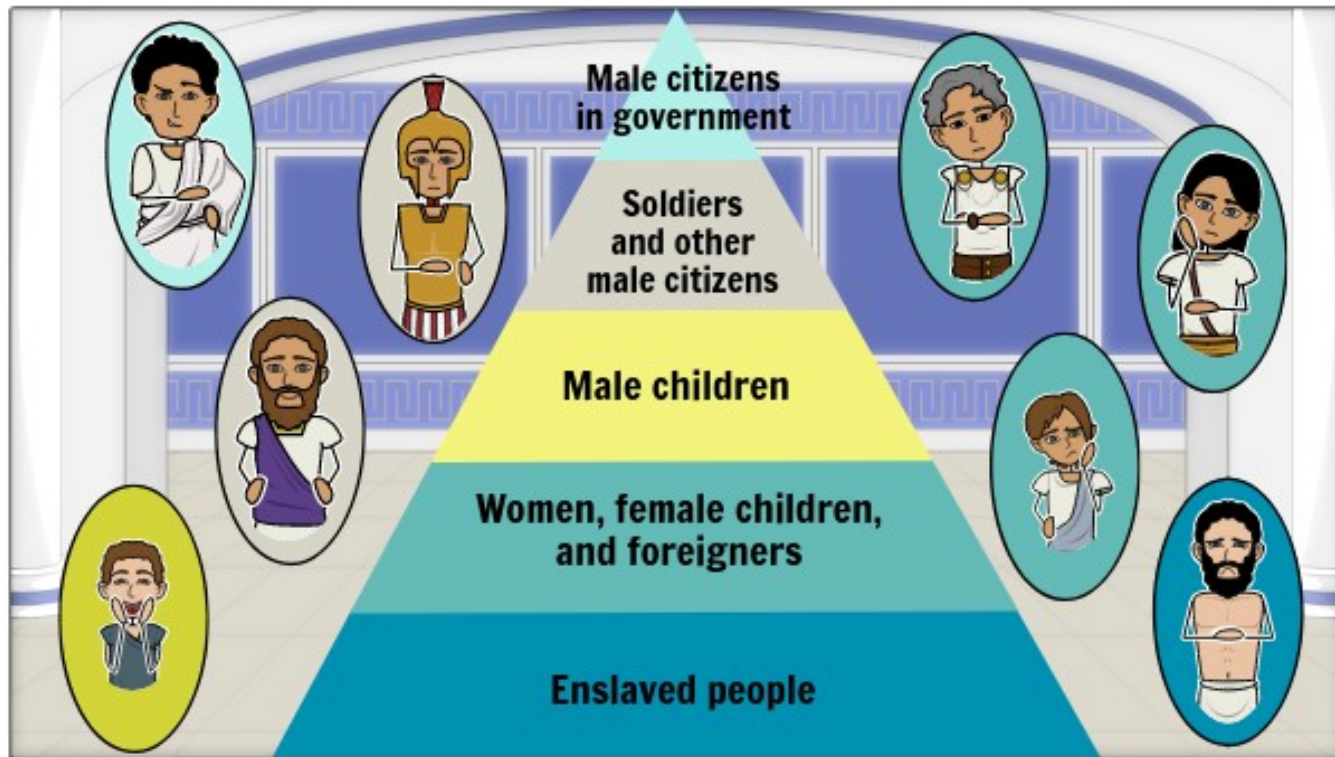


Major Topic: **Social Hierarchy**– A Pyramid of **Inequality** Found in Most Societies



How Do You say “Social Hierarchy” in Greek?

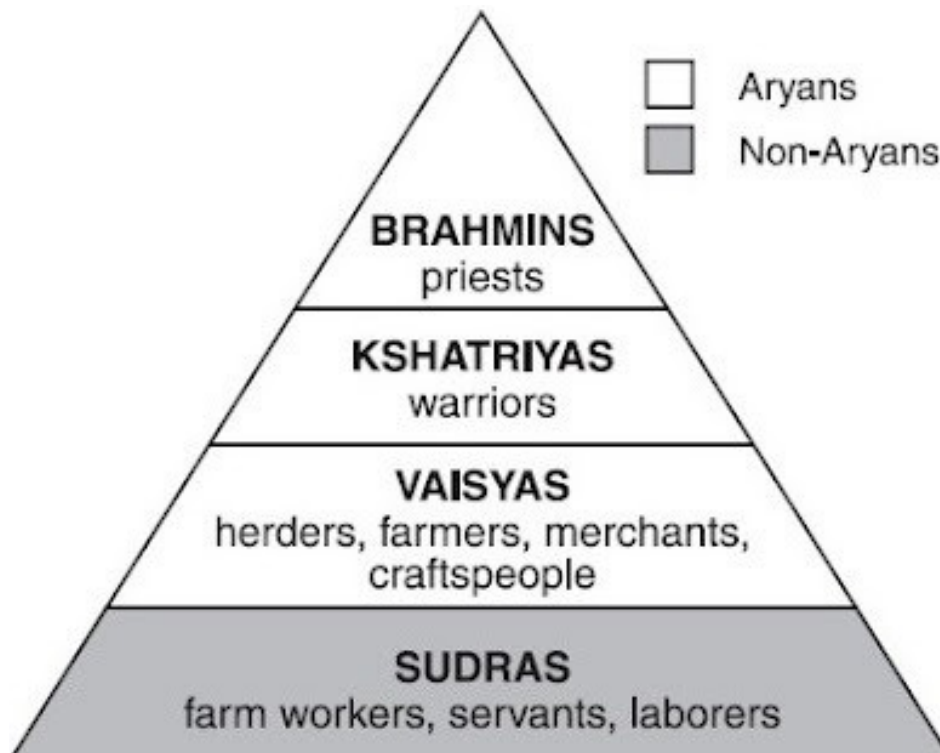
SOCIAL PYRAMID FOR ANCIENT GREECE



Ancient Greece had a strict social hierarchy. Only free men could be citizens and take part in government. Politicians were at the top, followed by soldiers and other male citizens, then male children. Women and female children had far fewer rights, as did foreigners. They were not citizens. Enslaved people had harsh lives and no rights.

Social hierarchy is common across Asia, as indeed in most societies, whether they admit it or not.

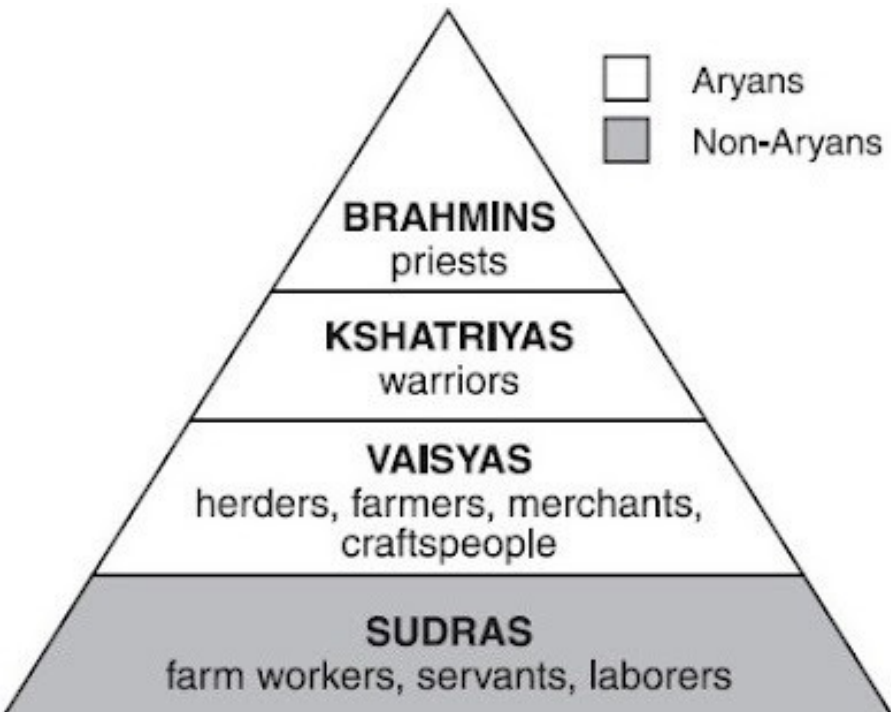
Left, Indian caste system. Right, Chinese hierarchy.



hierarchystructure.com



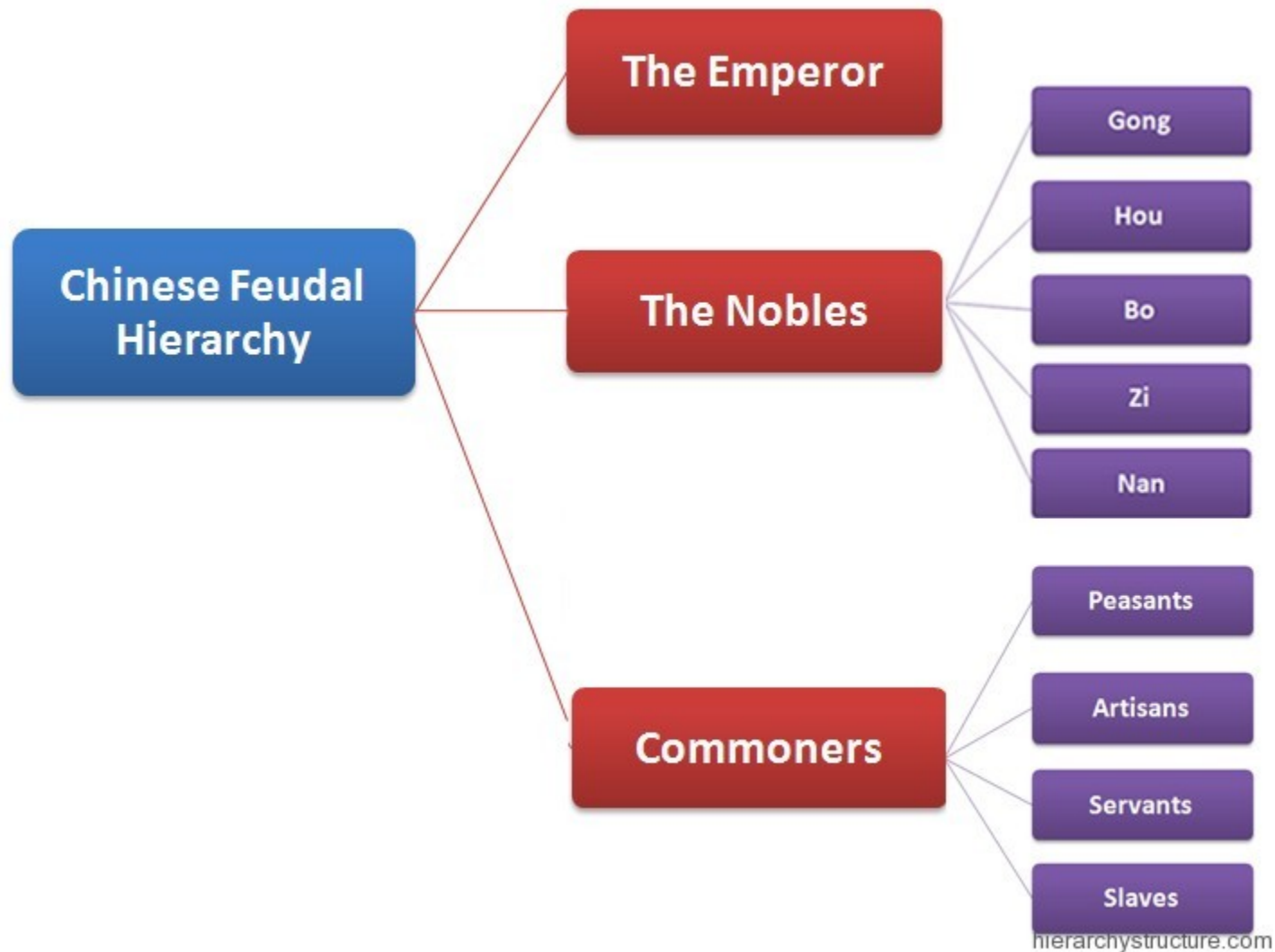
Further Details on the Indian Caste System



- **Caste** from Portuguese term **casta** meaning “species, type, race”
- Indian term **varna** means “color”
- Alternate Indian term is **jati**, meaning “lineage”, people sharing common ancestor or occupation
- Castes tend to be **endogamous** (marrying within one’s own group and not allowing intermarriage with others)



More comprehensive view of ancient Chinese social hierarchy:



Social Hierarchy:

Left, **medieval Japanese** social hierarchy.

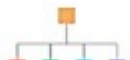
Right, **medieval Korean** class hierarchy.

Ancient Japanese Military Hierarchy




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<https://www.hierarchystructure.com/>

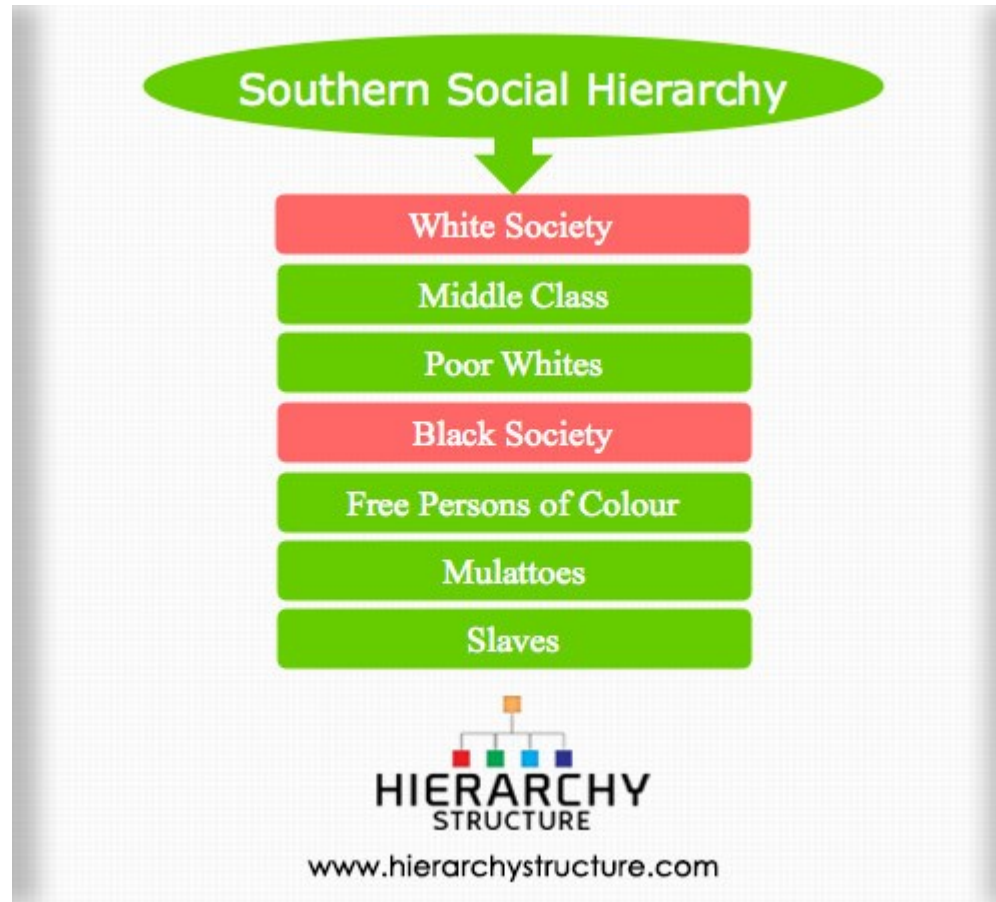


How we Americans *like* to view our social hierarchy and class structure:

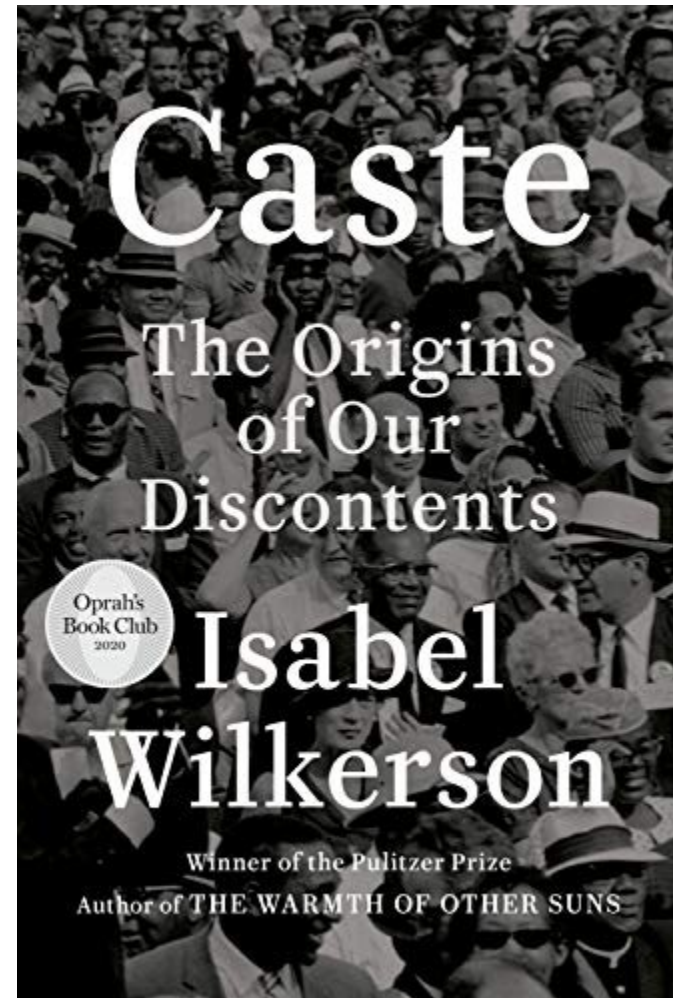
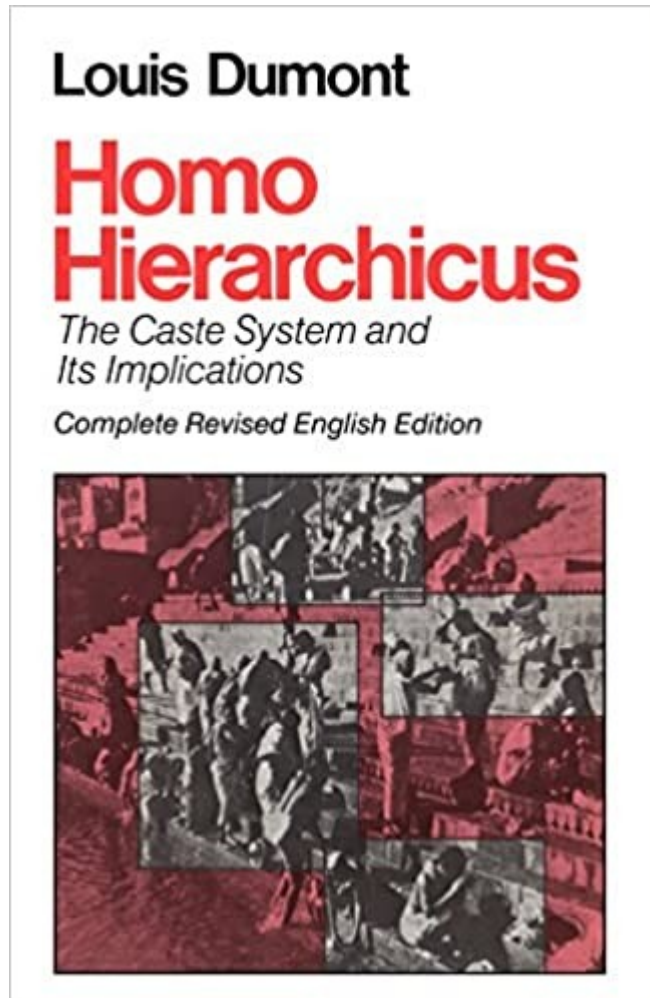
- **EVERYONE IS EQUAL!**
- **EVERYONE CAN MAKE IT IF THEY TRY!**
- **IF YOU ARE NOT SUPER-RICH, IT'S YOUR OWN FAULT!**
- *If we must admit to social classes, then we will say we have...*
- *Upper Class*
- *Middle Class*
- *Working Class*
- *The Poor*



American Racial Hierarchy



Important Works on Caste System from 1970 and 2020

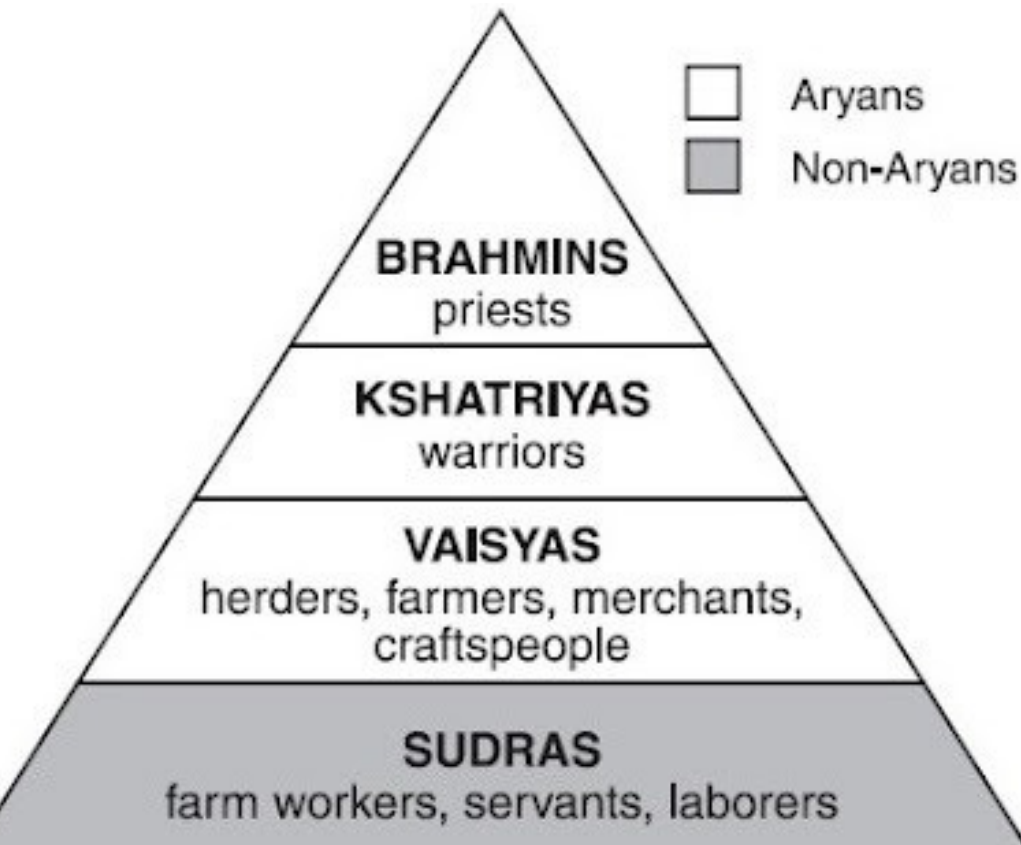


Sanskritization and its Analogues

- In 1966, Indian sociologist MS Srinivas introduced concept of “Sanskritization,” meaning the tendency of lower caste people to imitate the ways of upper caste people in order to rise higher in caste hierarchy
- Sanskrit was the elite language of scripture, that lower castes were not supposed to know
- By imitating upper caste Hindus, the lower could try to “fake it ‘til they make it” and “pass” as higher caste
- This is parallel to the behavior of lighter-skinned African- Americans in the past who would try to “pass” as white to improve their lives and evade racism
- Such social mobility does not change the system, just provides an escape valve



Classical Indian social hierarchy: *the Caste System*



- Caste from Portuguese word *casta* meaning “pure,” but Indian terms are *varna* (color) and *jati* (born).
- Varna= general caste category, Brahmins etc.
- Jati= local subgroups
- And... Untouchables or Dalits.



Ritual purity and rules of exchange undergirding caste/varna boundaries

- The key principle dividing caste or varna is ritual purity (spiritual purity).
- Only Brahmins can lead Vedic rituals, and only other “twice-born” (initiated into Vedic religion) “Aryan” castes, Kshatriyas and Vaishyas, can participate.
- Shudras? **No!**
- Untouchables? **HELL NO!**
- Brahmins are “pure,” thus anything they touch is pure, so anyone in any varna can eat anything touched or served or cooked by a Brahmin
- Cooking mixes one’s own caste qualities into food
- B’s can accept raw, uncooked food from lower castes, but cooked food would pollute them
- B’s should not drink water served by lower castes



Endogamy in Caste

- Caste or jati groups are usually *endogamous*, only allowing marriage to members of same caste or jati, with one exception:
- Lower-status castes have often used marriage to higher castes as method of social advancement
- By same token, higher-status castes resist letting their members marry lower castes
- Arranged marriages were the rule, though with exceptions, until modern times, with *semi*-arranged marriages now more common



Caste and *Gunas*

- In ancient Hindu philosophy of the *Samkhya* school, all things are viewed as made up of 3 *gunas* (qualities) in different degrees and combinations: *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas*.
- **Sattva**: Purity, knowledge, truth, goodness, clarity
- **Rajas**: Passion, energy, mixed good and bad, less clarity
- **Tamas**: Disorder, chaos, more bad than good, disorder, dirt, laziness, darkness
- The four main *varna* or caste categories corresponded to the three *gunas*:
 - **Brahmins** (priests): wise, perfect understanding and behavior, totally pure
 - **Kshatriyas** (warriors, rulers): strong, passionate, less pure
 - **Vaishyas** (producers): capable, less intelligent, somewhat impure
 - **Shudras** (laborers, slaves): possibly stupid & lazy, impure

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QEQ6jtrtUpk>



Gunas as general categories of classification

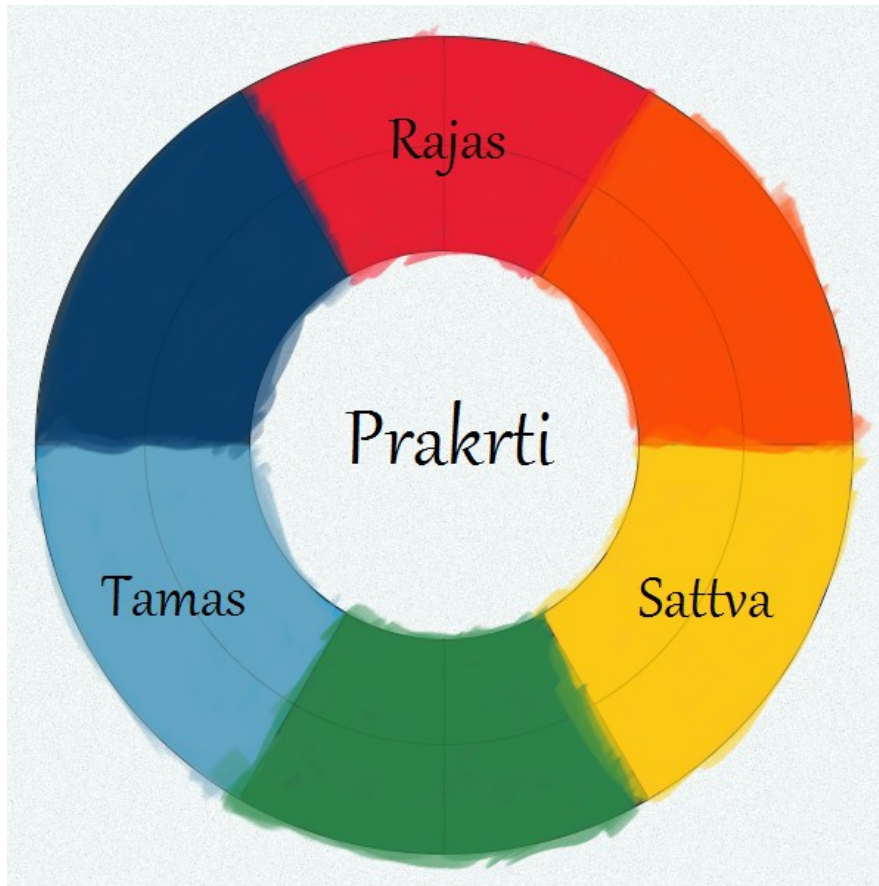
- Gunas provided a way of classifying everything into three hierarchically arranged categories, a best, middle, and worst
- Top is Sattva, everything clean & good. Middle is Rajas, mixed good/bad. Bottom is Tamas, all dirty & bad.
- Gunas can be applied to human psychology—we each have a personality leaning toward one guna, while containing other gunas too
- Society has gunas, with people in different classes of differing quality

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pAfARebFd_M

Gita Gita Dharma Shiksha: A Guide to Living a Spiritual Life



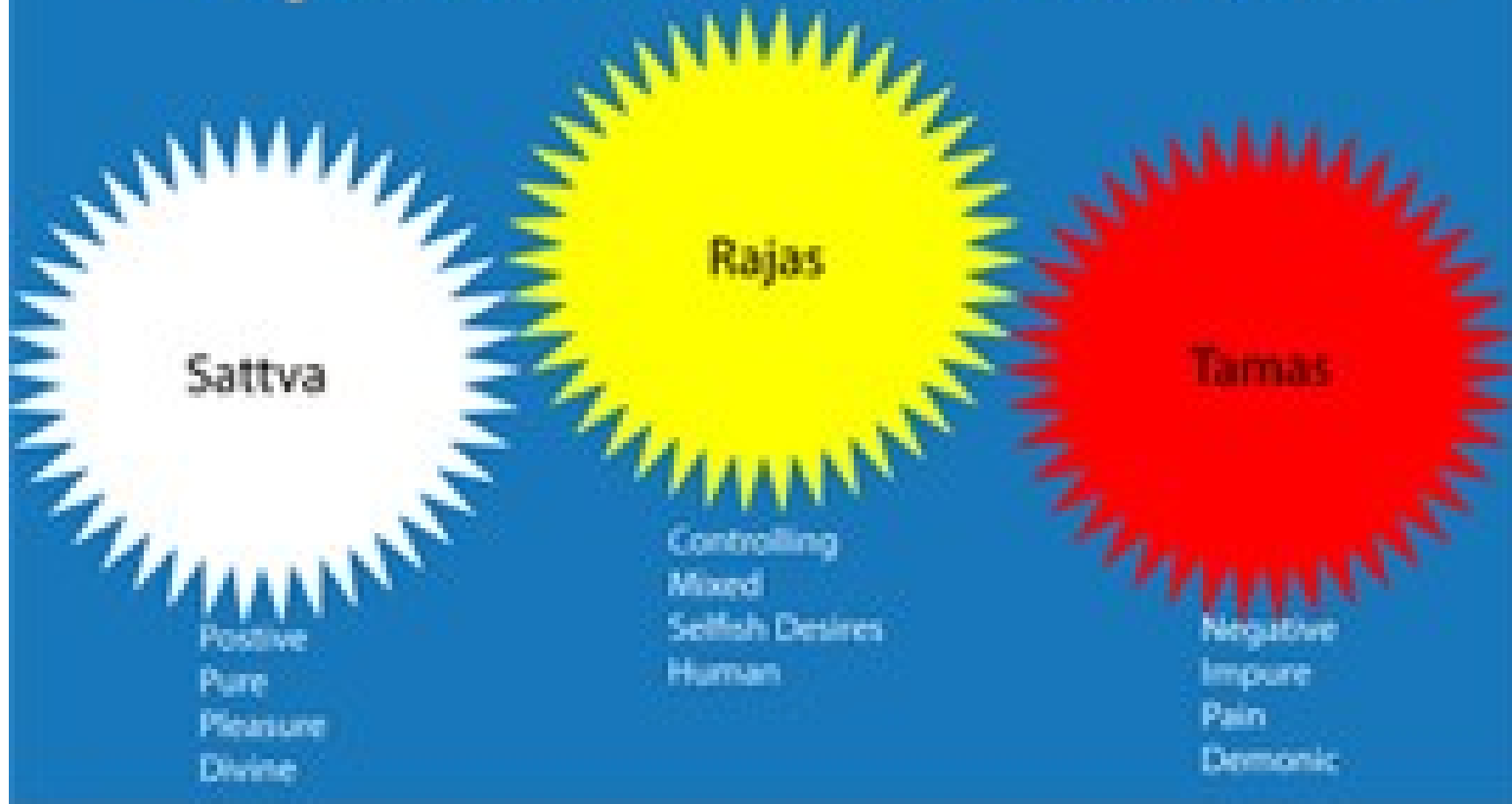
Prakrti is the Sanskrit word for physical matter, as opposed to **Purusha**, meaning spiritual essence. Gunas are shades of Prakrti, with higher qualities of Sattva tending toward Purusha.



- As you may suspect, this introduces a two-way tension, spiritual Purusha vs. material Prakrti, overlapping with 3-way guna division.



Triple Gunas or Modes of Existence



Gunas in Samkhya Philosophy

https://www.indianetzone.com/80/gunas_samkhya_philosophy.htm



<i>Raja</i>	<i>Sattva</i>	<i>Tamas</i>
Activity	Truth / Goodness	Inertia
Passion / desire	Light / illumination	Darkness
Energy	Spiritual Essence	Mass / matter / heaviness
Expansion	Upward flow	Downward flow
Movement	Intelligence / Consciousness	Sloth / dullness
Binds by passion born of craving and attachment.	Binds by means of attachment to knowledge and joy.	Binds by means of ignorance and obstruction.
Is the ruling trait when greed, excessive projects, cravings and restlessness arise.	Is the ruling trait when the light of knowledge shines forth.	Is the ruling trait when darkness, dullness, stagnation, indolence, confusion, torpor, and inertia appear.

https://aminoapps.com/c/hinduism/amp/blog/the-three-guna-s-and-moksha-transcendence/KWN2_g5GfMuWbdpjx5Q0q54Mrewa1qLGP



Very positive view of caste system, from Hindu American Foundation

The Four Traditional Varnas



Compare American Justifications for Racism, Slavery, and Current Inequalities

- (1) Bible-based argument: the “Curse of Ham”, claim that Noah punished his son Ham so that his son Canaan and all his descendants would be punished
- Africans were interpreted as Canaan’s descendants, deserving harsh treatment, though there is no mention of race or color in the actual Noah story in the Bible
- (2) Racist view that African-Americans are “naturally” inferior, lazy, stupid, violent, dishonest...
- (3) Idea that slavery was “good” for African-Americans as it provided secure employment, food, housing, etc (*never mind the lack of freedom!!*)
- (4) US Constitution has “3/5 clause” that counts Africans as 3/5 the value of Whites
- (5) Twisted Darwinism: Late 19th / 20th century views that blacks were of lower level evolution than whites
- **All these arguments have parallels in Indian views of lower castes and untouchables**



Another Pro-CASTE view

❖ Karma System in Ancient age:

© www.globindian.wordpress.com

Wealth (Money) [Vaishya]	King (Power) [Kshatriya]	Land (Service) [Shudra]	Wisdom (Knowledge) [Brahmin]
• Businessmen • Traders • Bankers • Agri-business • Dairy Farmers • Money-lenders	• Kings/Rulers • Soldiers • Administrators • Town Planners • Governance	• Labours • Artisans • Blacksmiths • Farmers • Land lords • Service	• Teachers • Scholars • Physicians/'Vaidya' • Judges • Priests /Writers • Mathematician • Poets/Authors • Astronomy/'Panchang'

❖ Karma System in Globalization:

Wealth (Money) (Business/Trade)	Ruler (Power) (Politicians)	Job/Service (Service Sector)	Wisdom (Knowledge/Skills)
• Businessmen • Bankers • Entrepreneurs • Industries • Start-ups • Gold/Diamond • Merchants • Share market • Traders	• Politicians • Military Heads • Administrators • Police force • Advisors • Bureaucrats • Diplomats • Executives	• Artists /Media • Company Staff • Manufacturing • Farmers • Entertainment • Authors/Writer • Services/Techie • Labors	• Professor/Lawyer • Doctors • Engineers • Priests/Scholars • Scientists • Astronomy • Expats/thinkers • Policy-makers



Something left out...

- The kinds of pro-caste arguments and diagrams noted previously make it seem like caste is just a nice rational ordering of job-opportunities and social organization to give everyone a kind of work that they can use to contribute and thrive in society, so that everyone can be happy and fulfilled
- What is left out is the lack of freedom or choice in the caste system: some are trapped in poverty with grimly restricted life conditions, others grow up with superiority and advantages
- **The different social categories of caste are NOT equal or fair!**



Important 20th century critic of caste and of Hinduism:
B.R. Ambedkar (1891-1956), main author of the 1949 Indian Constitution, which outlaws caste discrimination. He rejected Hinduism late in life and converted to Buddhism.



Caste is a state of mind. It is a disease of mind. The teachings of the Hindu religion are the root cause of this disease. We practice casteism and we observe Untouchability because we are enjoined to do so by the Hindu religion. A bitter thing cannot be made sweet. The taste of anything can be changed. But poison cannot be changed into nectar.

— B. R. Ambedkar —

AZ QUOTES





**Nothing can
emancipate the
outcaste except the
destruction of the
caste system.”**

B.R. Ambedkar



Caste described and justified in the Purusha Hymn (Creation Myth)

(*Rig Veda X.90*)

- When they divided (sacrificed) Purusha, how many portions did they make?
What do they call his mouth, his arms? What do they call his thighs and feet?
The **priests** were his mouth, of both his arms were the **warriors** made.
His thighs became the **merchants**, from his feet the **workers** were produced.
- (priests = **brahmins**; warriors = **kshatriyas**; merchants = **vaishyas**; workers = **shudras**.)
- *In ancient India, streets would be filled with cow and horse droppings; to be the feet would mean, frankly, having to deal with a lot of shit—literally!*



Family and Patriarchy (1)

- India and China have very tight and very patriarchal family structures
- Multiple generations have lived together when possible, with oldest male, father or grandfather, **THE** authority in the family
- Wives were expected to serve their husbands, though could become powerful as household managers in old age
- Boys were valued and pampered, not girls, partly because only males allowed to perform key family rituals for ancestors



Women's Roles as Described in important “Dharma Manual,” *the Laws of Manu* (Manusmṛiti)

- *I will tell the eternal duties of a man and wife who stay on the path of duty both in union and in separation.*
- *Men must make their women dependent day and night, and keep under their own control those who are attached to sensory objects.*
- *Her father guards her in childhood, her husband guards in her youth, and her sons guard her in old age.*
- ***A woman is not fit for independence.***
- *Laws of Manu, Book Nine, Verses 1-3*



Family and Patriarchy (2)

- Births of boys celebrated, but girls' births sometimes lamented as misfortune
- Girls were viewed as a family "liability," as an expensive dowry had to be provided to the family of their future husbands, almost as a bribe to take the bride
- In modern India, brides have died suspiciously in what have been called "dowry deaths," when husband's family complained that dowry payments not enough
- In modern China, female fetuses often aborted because of preference for boys



Different Attitudes in Japan and Southeast Asia

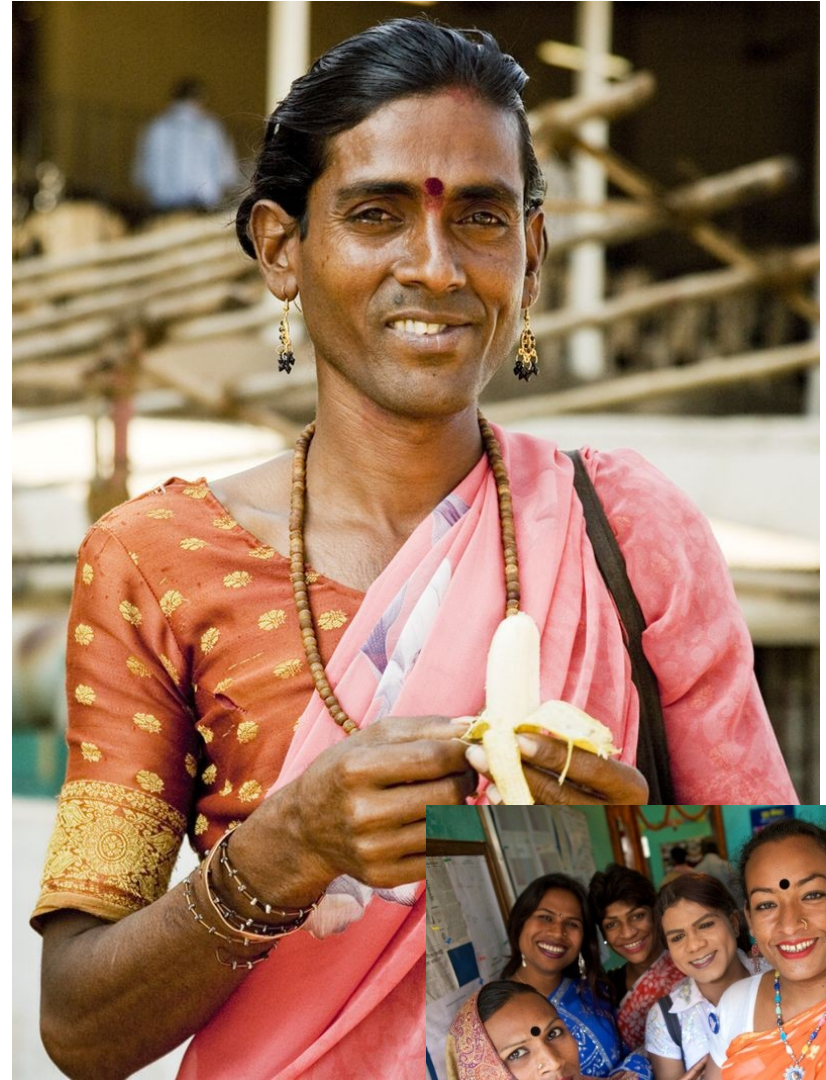
- In Japan and SE Asia, we find more positive views toward women, and a more relaxed attitude toward sexuality in general; the two often go together
- Repressive attitudes toward sex often correlate with negative view of women as “evil temptresses” (Eve, etc.)
- A famous medieval novel of Japan, *The Tale of Genji*, tells of a young noblewoman’s many premarital love affairs with no trace of disapproval
- Medieval Vietnam was subservient to Ming China, copying its law code, EXCEPT for the part about women, which it refused to follow



Gender-Bending and Trans Issues

(1)

- Hindu and Buddhist myths both have gods who change gender, and both male and female devotees of Kṛṣṇa may take on female role in imitation of Rādhā
- India has a long tradition of *hijra*, hermaphrodites (dual-sexed) or transsexuals (men to women) who are employed as dancers and entertainers, accepted as a kind of “trans caste”



Worshippers acting out Krishna(r) and Radha (L)

Which one is the macho male?



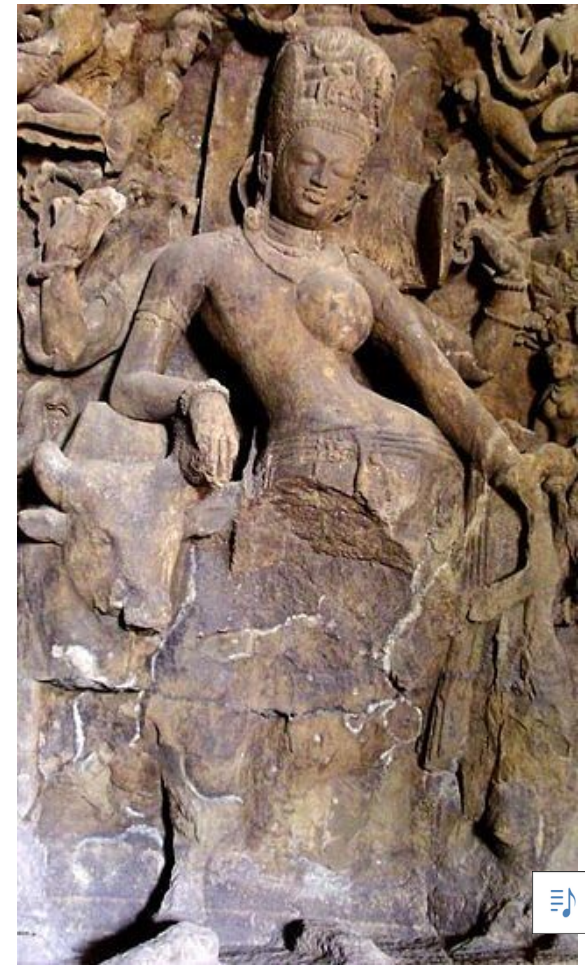
Boy dressed as Krishna

This is NOT John Wayne country!



Ardhanarishvara:

“the half-female lord,” dual-gender deity combining male Shiva with his female consort Parvati, and splitting the difference



The Lord Who Is Half Woman

*Arāḥamārīśvara in Indian
and Feminist Perspective*



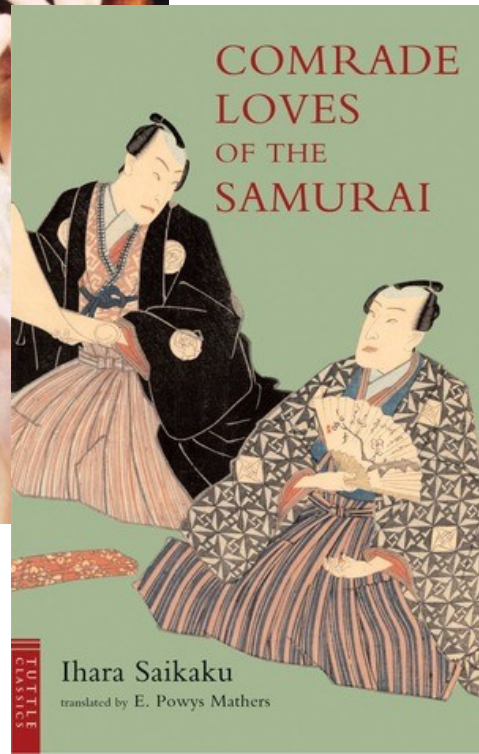
Ellen Goldberg



Vaikuntha Kamalaja: dual-gender deity,
combining male Vishnu with his female consort
Lakshmi



Gender-Bending and Trans Issues (2)



- Homosexual relations were common among Samurai in Japan
- Japan also has a long tradition of men playing female roles in Noh and Kabuki theater; India and SE Asia also do this with ritual or theatrical performances of Hindu epics like the Ramayana



END OF UNIT

